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ABSTRACT

Readers theater is a dramatic art that directs attention to the words of a text. During a performance, a reader (rather than an actor) presents and interprets the work within a narrative context intended by the author. In this project, the text, a collection of the words and writings of a woman known as the Peace Pilgrim, tells the story of her 28-year pilgrimage for peace. This text reflects a transformational approach to peace education; it promotes living a life that is nonviolent at every level. Participants in the study were 10 college students enrolled in an independent study. Results of the study are discussed with regard to five issues: (1) students' choice to participate in the study; (2) students' reactions to Peace Pilgrim as a potential role model; (3) students' reactions to the use of readers theater as a curriculum tool; (4) changes in students' attitudes toward peace education; and (5) changes in students' emotional reactions to the concept of world peace. Student reaction to the readers theater project was enthusiastic; as a method for peace education, readers theater, although performance based, was relatively non-threatening. Creating and performing a readers theater requires active participation and provides students with a sense of accomplishment because their work results in a tangible project (script) and production (performance). An "Education Priorities Survey" is attached. (ND)

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Peace Pilgrim: A Readers Theatre Approach to Peace Education

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The purpose of this project is to investigate the potential of a readers theatre format for research on the topic of peace education. Readers theatre may be a vehicle for peace education and may also provide a new context for research on a variety of developmental and educational issues.

History of the project

The Peace Pilgrim project actually began in the mid-1980s as a program developed by myself and members of Woman's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND). The setting was a time of discouragement, continued escalation of funding for "Star Wars" and members who had been actively involved in protest activities (picketing, advertising consequences of nuclear war symbolically, letter writing campaigns, speaking at public events) were tired, discouraged and looking for inspiration. Helen Caldicott, founder of WAND, had taken a leave from the organization to find her own inspiration in the writings of both eastern and western pacifists. At this same time I discovered a copy of Peace Pilgrim in a local bookstore.

The text, a collection of words and writings of a woman known as Peace Pilgrim, told the story of a woman who began a pilgrimage for peace in 1954 and continued her quest for the next 28 years. Her message was simple: overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth and hatred with love. Peace Pilgrim gave her formula for inner peace as a series of purifications and relinquishments, including decisions to own no more than necessary material goods and to relinquish "worry" as a wasted emotion. This quest for inner peace achieved, she determined that her mission was to become a pilgrim for peace. I had discovered a role model, someone who found great strength from within, for as she described, she had found inner peace--a first step in working toward peace in the world. Peace Pilgrim spoke to university classes, church groups and anyone who approached her during her 20,000 miles-plus journey, and the text includes many of her experiences on the road.

I wrote a first draft of a readers theatre based on the text of Peace Pilgrim and a group of WAND members completed and performed a readers theatre production of Peace Pilgrim. We described our experience at the time as being inspired to continue with our work, affirmed in our mission and grateful for having found a more positive way to contribute to the peace movement. In her review of peace education curricula, Reardon (1988) described two categories within which peace education programs fit: positive peace and negative peace. These categories provided a frame to describe our experiences. We had

been active in ways associated with negative peace: taking action toward the achievement of peace and disarmament through explaining, persuading and attempting to get people to respond. We needed to add elements of positive peace: creating a sense of social justice, creating a vision toward which we could work. The words of Peace Pilgrim affirmed us in our work and also reminded us to celebrate our accomplishments.

More recently I wondered if that model would work with college students, and if I could demonstrate that creating a readers theatre was a viable means of peace education, and if creating the readers theater would inform the research community about adolescent development, particularly in relation to issues of peace. I wrote to Friends of Peace Pilgrim, publishers of the text Peace Pilgrim and they sent copies of the book and videotapes of Peace Pilgrim made during her pilgrimage.

Rationale

Peace education as curriculum. Current work in the field of peace education documents three approaches: a reform approach, a reconstructive approach and a transformational approach (Reardon, 1988). The reform approach has as its goal to change people's behaviors: prevent war, control the arms race, focus on nonviolent means when dealing with conflict. The classroom practice for such an approach is skill based, including conflict resolution models, problem-solving models, communications and the like.

The reconstructive approach seeks structural and institutional change. Efforts focus on establishing institutions to resolve conflicts. Classroom practice for this approach centers on establishing a knowledge base. Institutions through which change can be made are studied and evaluated. Students learn to appreciate reasons for conflict and ways to intervene institutionally.

The transformational approach takes a broader view and seeks a more comprehensive goal--to reject violence in any and all of its forms. A transformational approach calls for a change in thinking and the formation of a particular set of values. To do this, emphasis in peace education takes multiple forms. Recognizing the complexity of the issues surrounding peace edcuation, programs are developed on a variety of topics from conflict resolution to appreciation of the connectedness of humans within the world around them. However, here the focus is not on the content as much as individual attitudes. Peace education from a transformation approach is a process, training toward knowledge and understanding of the complexities of countries and policies as well as skills in communication, listening and comprehending the views of others as well as articulating one's own position. Finally transformational peace

education requires compromise, selecting topics and presenting them where student interests and abilities coincide. Peace education requires that people determine that peace is a value toward which we strive. The transformation is recognizing one's individual responsibility for peace.

The text used in this study, Peace Pilgrim, is a narrative that reflects a transformational approach. Peace Pilgrim promotes living a life that is nonviolent at every level. Her peace message describes a process through which one can achieve inner peace and thus affect peace in the world. For example, one step to inner peace is to provide some kind of service to others. She says that one cannot achieve peace in isolation but must be involved in community. Peace Pilgrim promotes social justice by articulating values that support this concept and says that this is the way to a happy and fulfilling life.

Readers theatre as a treatment condition/curriculum. Readers theatre is a dramatic art which directs attention to the words of a text. During a performance a reader (rather than an actor) presents the work and interprets the work within a narrative context intended by the author. Emphasis remains on the text rather than on the development of character. In a readers theatre one is speaking for the author rather than for a character. Readers theatre is one form of storytelling; forms can be utilized to create emphasis, individual and choral speaking can be incorporated and a choice can be made as to what material is included. Creating a readers theatre allows the editor(s) to emphasize some aspects of the material and to de-emphasize other aspects. These choices come about as a reader responds to the text and selects those parts that make up a message that s/he wants to share in a public forum. In creating a readers theatre, a group must act cooperatively, listen to each other, and compromise in selecting the most relevant aspects of the piece. Discussions center on the group's interpretation and creation of meaning as a response to the text.

In his review of psychological activites of reading, Gerrig (1993) proposed two metaphors to characterize experiences of narratives:"being transported by a narrative by virtue of performing that narrative" (p.2). He emphasized the phenomena of being transported out of one's immediate environemnt of time and place and entering some other, either of the writer's making or some netherworld of interaction between the writer and reader. Gerrig continues his investigation of the effects on readers experiencing narrative worlds, "we can wonder whether narratives, by causing us to collapse the distinction between reader and narratee, might change our views of what sort of people we are." Using a peace education narrative encourages individuals to consider who they are as peacemakers without demanding a particular decision in terms of actions to take or ideology to adopt.

Christ (1975) wrote that "there is a dialectic between story and experience. Stories shape experience; experience shapes stories." (in Christ and Plaskow, 1979, p.229) Employing a readers theatre approach begins with someone's story, in this case the story of Peace Pilgrim, and invites readers to shape that story and tell it again flavored with their own interpretation. Creating a readers theatre engages one actively in the text, reexperiencing one's experience of the text by actively recreating the same words in a changed format.

Methods

This study began with a posting of advertisements that a 1-credit research in educational psychology independent study was available. Interested students completed a pre-test before being told what the project entailed, and then decided whether or not to take the classs. The pre-test consisted of 2 closed and 6 open-ended questions (See appendix). Sixteen students completed the pre-test, and 10 students enrolled in the independent study. The students ranged in age from twenty to forty-four, with median age 22, and represented majors in Anthropology (1), Education (3), Psychology (4) and Child and Family Studies (2). They met for 2 hours per week for the first seven weeks of the Spring semester. The course requirement was to read the book Peace Pilgrim, and to act as informed participants in the study. Students kept weekly logs, written reactions to videotapes, readings and to class sessions, and brought to class the sections of the text that they thought were important to include in the final readers theatre production. Class sessions were used to determine the theme and key points to include in the readers theatre, to discuss reactions to the text and to practice the actual performance program. The performance was presented to graduate students enrolled in a special topics course: developing cooperative classroom communities. A focused group interview was conducted during the final class session to review the performance, project and research procedures. At this time students again responded to the same questions presented in the pretest.

Results and Discussion

Results of this study will be presented with regard to five issues: (a) students' choice to participate in the study; (b) students' reactions to Peace Pilgrim as a potential role model; (c) students' reactions to the use of readers theatre as curriculum tool; (d) change in students' attitudes toward peace education; and (e) change in students' emotional reactions to concept of world peace.

A. Students' choice to participate in the study. Emotional reaction when asked to consider world peace was split evenly between positive and negative reactions for the sixteen students

who completed the pretest. Seven stated that their reaction was "hopeful" and one stated that she experienced "all of the emotions at one time or another", both positive and negative. Six students said they felt "discouraged" and two were "frightened." Of the students who chose to participate in the project, five described their reactions as "hopeful," three "discouraged," and one "frightened". Sixty per cent of the students who decided to participate reported positive reactions when asked to consider world peace. Sixty-six per cent of the students who decided not to participate had negative reactions when asked to consider world peace.

While the number of students here is too small to draw generalizable conclusions, I find it interesting that a majority of students who had negative emotional reactions chose not to participate. One of the first steps toward addressing any policy/issue that requires change is to be willing to think about it. When the policy/issue inspires a negative affective state, there is a tendency to avoid thinking about it. In an immediate sense this avoidant behavior reduces anxiety, but this is not an effective solution. Peace educators need to be aware of ways of reducing this anxiety so that students can engage the peace curriculum.

B. Students' reactions to Peace Pilgrim as a potential role model. During the first class session, before the students had read the text Peace Pilgrim, they watched some videos of Peace Pilgrim. These were short segments of news programs and taped lectures that Peace Pilgrim gave in the late 1970s. Students' comments during class discussion and log entries described Peace Pilgrim as

> "I really like her spirit and her determination. I think she is slightly naive about the "good" in everyone."
>
> "I was truly interested in what she was saying . . .but it began to seem as if she was preaching"
>
> "she was sounding like kind of a preacher and I was rather intimidated by her."
>
> "she seems like too much of an optimist . . . a little naive"

While initial reactions to Peace Pilgrim were not especially positive, once the students read the text, their responses were favorable:

> "I liked Peace Pilgrim. Overall I think she's a good person with wonderful goals."
>
> "I enjoyed reading Peace Pilgrim. I think she is a very interesting person. I loved her stories. I thought she had

made a difference in many people's lives which I am very impressed by."

"I began to realize that Peace Pilgrim was not just a crazy lady, but someone who had a message and wanted to spread it to everyone."

One pivotal class discussion that resulted in transitions to more positive feelings toward Peace Pilgrim was a discussion on differences between religion and spirituality. One student's log entry for this discussion,

"Our discussion in class mainly centered on how Peace Pilgrim states that she bears no religion but is herself a very religious person. This to me was troubling because I myself am not a religious person and the fact that she spoke of God so much, it came across to me that she was preaching and I could not relate to what she was saying. I think this is the point that many others had and will have a problem with her. In class though we came to the conclusion that she is more spiritual than religious. This cleared up a lot of problems that I had with her and now I could try to relate to her more."

A week later this same student wrote, "I have now finished the book and I enjoyed it very much. . . This book helped me open my eyes about myself and my relationships with others."

Interpreting the students reactions to Peace Pilgrim requires a consideration of the place of role models in adolescent identity development. Role models serve to assist adolescents in articulating ideas, offer someone with whom an adolescent can measure his/her own choices and behaviors. Both religious and political identity development are most often achieved during the college years. These are among the later achieved identities, related to the degree of salience the issues hold. During the college years, students are most likely to have rejected (at least temporarily) formal religious affiliations but are very interested in investigating spiritual issues and forming their individual belief systems separate from dictates of formal religions. Providing a potential role model for issues related to both politics and religion allowed students to consider their own positions. The students were unanimous in stating that Peace Pilgrim served as an effective role model. Their initial discomfort was due to their perception of her work as "preaching" and they did not want to be associated with proselytizing. This reflects adolescents' sensitivity to putting their values onto someone else and their need to determine their own values for themselves. Their discomfort also reflects a rejection of the standard set of laws associated with formal religions which are being evaluated as they seek to achieve religious identity.

C. Students' reactions to readers theatre as a curriculum tool. Students commented on the working relationships established as the readers theatre was developed in their weekly logs,

"As we were editing and all talking in our small groups, I realized that this was a good feeling. It was a pleasant experience to be reminded that young adults can relate to these philosophies"

"I like the group because everyone is offering their comments."

" We had to work together and we did well. This was like cooperative learning."

When questioned the students all agreed that the parts they thought most important had indeed been included in the script and were satisfied that they had individually contributed to the piece.

Students also reported that creating a readers theatre was more effective than simply reading the text. One person stated that "you understand it better when you take pieces out" and another said "it (creating readers theatre) helps your reading comprehension." Another student wrote, " I . . . like what we have to say and each time I read it, it becomes more meaningful and I am reminded that it is important that we say these thoughts."

D. Changes in students' attitudes toward peace education. Likert scale ratings of various educational topics were evaluated positively by all students with little variability. The only subject deemed not important to teach in school was "religion." "Moral education" and "Peace education" both received consistent postive ratings. There was no measurable change in student ratings of these topics.

Some change in attitude toward peace education was evident in the responses to questions about contributions citizens could make to world peace. In the pretest survey 80% of the responses reflected the reform approach and 20% the transformational. On the posttest survey, 80% reflected the transformational approach. For the most part, the change was due to additions of transformational ideas to those that already included reforms. For example, transformational suggestions included

"each person's voice in favor of peace and against violence makes a difference"

"community service, a lot of community service, a general sense of humanity and rational decision-making"

"they could encourage non-violence in their communities"

"to have inner peace which shines out to those around them"

Students responses to a question regarding the need for peace education indicate that the topic has become more salient to them:

"doing this independent study it made me aware of peace education "

"after completing this project, I realize that something as easy as this study raises the awareness in individuals--it did in me"

"the peace project helped me to realize its importance (peace education that is) and how it can be done"

E. Changes in students' emotional reactions to the concept of world peace. At the end of the project, 70% of those who participated responded that their reaction to considering world peace was "hopeful." Log entries that illustrated this point included,

"because of our peace project, because my beliefs in other humans has been strengthened"

"now that I have participated in Peace Pilgrim, I feel like I have contributed more to peace in the world than before"

"this class has made me most aware of the need (for peace education). By seeing the different ways to have peace in your life, it seems so easy and so helpful. If more people knew how it (sic) we would have such a better world."

The shift toward a more hopeful attitude was largely due to recognizing that there was something that an individual could do, i.e. the students felt that they could individually make some contribution, but also that through the project that they had taken some action for peace as well. A change in emotional reaction from negative to positive was found for two of the four students who initially had negative reactions. Given the small sample size, one cannot generalize. More research needs to be completed to effectively determine the potential of such an approach to change attitudes.

Conclusion

Student reaction to the readers theatre project was enthusiastic. As a method for peace education, readers theatre, although performance based, is relatively non-threatening. Creating and preforming a readers theatre requires active participation and provides students with a sense of

accomplishment because their work results in a tangible product (script) and production (performance). This particular choice of text, Peace Pilgrim, seems to work well with older adolescents, as it did with the original adult group. Creating the readers theatre made issues of peacemaking more salient to the students involved. This salience of political issues has been defined as a key variable in achievement of political identity (Carmines, 1991).

From a developmental perspective, readers theatre provides a potentially exciting means of evaluating identity issues. A script can be analyzed to determine points of interest, and a difference in interests can be noted. My experiences of two scripts prepared from Peace Pilgrim were remarkably different. The first, created by adult members of a political action group, emphasized affirmation of actions with little attention given to religious values. The script centered on the people Peace Pilgrim met during her travels, and the message she spread. The second, created by older adolescents, emphasized an articulation of ideas and values and paid less attention to particular actions. While beyond the scope of this study, a more detailed analysis of created scripts could potentially inform us about psychological development.

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Education Priorities Survey

1. How important do you think it is for schools to have programs, workshops, courses, reading materials and the like for the following topics?

Rate each of the following on a 6 point scale, from very important(6) to not important at all (1)

	very important					not important
	6	5	4	3	2	1
sports	6	5	4	3	2	1
fine arts	6	5	4	3	2	1
music	6	5	4	3	2	1
drama	6	5	4	3	2	1
community service	6	5	4	3	2	1
conflict resolution	6	5	4	3	2	1
moral education	6	5	4	3	2	1
dance	6	5	4	3	2	1
religion	6	5	4	3	2	1
reading	6	5	4	3	2	1
science	6	5	4	3	2	1
writing	6	5	4	3	2	1
arithmetic	6	5	4	3	2	1
spelling	6	5	4	3	2	1
political science	6	5	4	3	2	1
current events	6	5	4	3	2	1
peace education	6	5	4	3	2	1
sex education	6	5	4	3	2	1
automotives	6	5	4	3	2	1

industrial arts	6	5	4	3	2	1
cosmotology	6	5	4	3	2	1
history	6	5	4	3	2	1
literature	6	5	4	3	2	1
social studies	6	5	4	3	2	1
human rights education	6	5	4	3	2	1
business	6	5	4	3	2	1
word processing	6	5	4	3	2	1

2. Do you feel responsible for making some personal contribution to peace in the world? Why/why not?

3. Which of the following terms best describes your emotional reaction when asked to consider world peace?

a) depressed
b) discouraged
c) hopeful
d) frightened
e) disinterested
f) other _____

4. What contributions do you believe a common citizen could make to world peace?

5. Do you believe that every person has the responsibility to take an active role in promoting peace in the community? Explain.

6. What do you think are the major blocks to establishing peace in the world?

7. If schools took on the challenge of providing peace education programs, what do you think should be taught?

8. Do you think there is a need for peace education? _____
If yes, what event or experience made you most aware of the need for peace education?